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SERAPIS, BOUKOLOI AND CHRISTIANS FROM HADRIAN TO MARCUS AURELIUS.

1. *Egyptian gods in the Diaspora Revolt.*

The discussion on the role of Hadrian in favouring religious pluralism cannot avoid surveying what was going on in Egypt in the second century AD. This paper will take into consideration the role of Egyptian gods, in particular of Serapis, in the religious life of Egypt from the end of the reign of Trajan to the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and will explore the possible overlaps between the cult of Serapis and the rise of Christianity. The documents will be tested on the hypothesis that Hadrian's religious policy of pluralism gave the early Christian communities an opportunity to flourish.

The Diaspora Revolt (AD116-17) had implications and repercussions that affected Egyptian religion. A rebellion in Judaea was provoked by the dedication of a statue to Juppiter-Serapis by the *Legio III* of Lusius Quietus,[1] and the *Historia Augusta* talks about a Jewish revolt generated by a conflict over the finding of the body of the Apis Bull in Egypt.[2] Serapis or Osirapis, a fusion of Osiris and the Apis Bull, was basically the sacred bull of Memphis after its death, a combination god that had existed in Egypt since Pharaonic times as a god of the underworld and a symbol of the annual resurrection of nature. Under the Ptolemies, Apis was assimilated or associated to various Hellenistic deities, including Zeus, Helios, Dionysos, Hades and Asklepios to form Serapis, a Hellenised god of the sun (Helios), fertility (Dionysos), the underworld and healing (Asklepios and Hades), who ended up being the most popular god in Egypt and the patron deity of the city of Alexandria.[3]

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[1] The *vexillatio* of the *legio III Cyrenaica* dedicated a statue with the inscription *[I]ovi O(ptimo) M(aximo) Sarapidi pro salute et victoria* (*CIL* III 13587 = *ILS* 4393). The date is uncertain, as the statue could be of either Trajan or Hadrian. Cf. FIRPO 2005, 107-116. According to a comment of Hippolytus Romanus (III century) to *Mt* 24.21, the legion of Quietus put a statue of Kore in the temple of Jerusalem. On the Diaspora Revolt see now BEN ZEEV 2005.

[2] *HA Hadr.* 12.1.

[3] Cf. a description of Serapis in Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.20.13 *Eidem Aegypto adiacens civitas, quae conditorem Alexandrum Macedonem gloriatur, Sarapin atque Isin cultu paene attonitae venerationis observat. Omnem*

Egyptian documents lend further support to the view that in the Diaspora Revolt the Jews attacked Egyptian religion, and destroyed many pagan temples, including possibly parts of the Alexandrian Serapeum.[4] The iconoclastic attitude of the Jews against the pagan images and temples explains why the documents describe them as ἀνόσιοι, 'impious'. The author of *POxy* 4.705 stated that 'Our one hope and final expectation depended on the banding together of the villagers of the nome to fight against the impious Jews', and a letter of the *epistrategos* of Apollonopolis-Heptacomia to the prefect Rammius Martialis attributes to the 'impious Jews' the responsibility for the disasters in Egypt.[5] When the Jews lost in battle, the Greeks offered sacrifices to the gods[6], and, when the revolt was suppressed, they instituted an annual memorial.[7] Eudaimonis, the mother of the *strategos* of the Apollonopolite nome, wrote in a letter: 'be sure that I shall pay no attention to God until I get my son back safe', as if the god in question was directly involved in the war.[8]

One may wonder what side the Egyptian Christians decided to take in the Diaspora Revolt. After the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in 70 and the capture of Masada in 74, it was not a good idea to support the Jews, who had a bad reputation of rioters and anti-imperial rebels, despite the apologetic efforts of Josephus and of the early rabbinic schools. At

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tamen illam venerationem soli se sub illius nomine testatur inpendere, vel dum calathum capitis eius infigunt, vel dum simulachro signum tricipitis animantis adiungunt quod exprimit medio eodemque maximo capite leonis effigiem: dextra parte caput canis exoritur, mansueta specie blandientis: pars vero laeva cervicis rapacis lupi capite finitur, easque formas animalium draco conectit volumine suo, capite redeunte dei dexteram qua conpescitur monstrum. 'In the city on the borders of Egypt which boasts Alexander of Macedon as its founder, Serapis and Isis are worshiped with a reverence that is almost fanatical. Evidence that the sun, under the name of Serapis, is the object of all this reverence is either the basket set on the head of the god or the figure of a three-headed creature placed by his statue. The middle head of this figure, which is also the largest, represents a lion's; on the right a dog raises its head with a gentle and fawning air; and on the left the neck ends in the head of a ravening wolf. All three beasts are joined together by the coils of a serpent whose head returns to the god's right hand which keeps the monster in check.' On Serapis as the Ptolemaic patron god of Alexandria, in place of the original patron deity Agathos Daimon, see BELL 1954, 19-22, who also interprets Serapis as a protector of the travellers by sea. On Serapis and Alexandria, see also FRASER 1960, 19, STAMBAUGH 1972, 1-53 and TRAN TAM TINH 1982, 115-16.

[4] On damages to buildings and roads during the Diaspora Revolt, cf. APPLEBAUM 1951 and 1962 and SMALLWOOD 1976, 399.

[5] SMALLWOOD 1976, 58.

[6] *CPJ* 2.439.8-10.

[7] *CPJ* 2.450.ii.33-35. The festival was still celebrated in 202.

[8] *CPJ* 2.442.25-28.

least some Christians, in addition, probably saw the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem as an opportunity for them to cut off their Jewish roots and build a separate identity that might be more acceptable throughout the empire. Moreover, the sudden disappearance, after the Diaspora revolt, of the documents concerning the Egyptian Jews have suggested that in Egypt there was not much continuity between the Jewish and the Christian communities, as the former was virtually obliterated, while the latter increased.[9]

Although the Egyptian documents do not talk explicitly about the position of the Christians in the Diaspora Revolt, we may suspect that they did not support the Jews. According to Justin, in fact, in the Bar Kochba revolt of 132-5, the Christians supported Rome, and even suffered violence on the part of the Jewish rebels for doing so.[10] It is likely that a good number of Christians in Egypt wanted to be seen as something independent from Judaism, and thus did not support the Jews. Paradoxically, the Christians may have chosen to be on the side of Serapis.[11]

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[9] BEN ZEEV 2005, 266 states that the consequences of the Diaspora Revolt 'equaled or even surpassed those of the two more famous Jewish wars of 66-70 and 132-135'.

[10] *I.Apol.* 31.6. Eusebius *HE* 4.8.4. Hier. *Chron*. 201 Helm. Oros 7.13.4. GALIMBERTI 2007, 150 n. 156 rightly notes that in Justin's *Dial. Cum Tryphone* 9.3 the conversation between Jews and Christians on the Bar Kochba Revolt is a sign that it was still a topical issue in his time.

[11] A passage in the book on dreams by Artemidorus of Daldis (*Oneirokritika* 4.24) says that a stratopeda/rxhj (*praefectus castrorum*) fighting against the Diaspora Revolt at Cyrene had written on his sword the Greek letters ικθ, *iota* for Ioudaiois, *kappa* for Kurenaiois, and *theta* for θάνατος, to form the message 'death to the Jews of Cyrene'. According to the interpretation by DEL CORNO 1975, 338, n. 34. STRASSI 2008, 89-90 suggests an identification with the *stratopedarches* mentioned in *PMich* 8.478.26. It is impossible not to think of the Greek ἰχθ[ύς] (with a *chi* instead of the *kappa*), the 'fish' that became a symbol of Christ and a catchword of the Christians. The earliest known reference to the fish as a Christian symbol is in Clement of Alexandria (150-215), in *Paed.* 3.11, where he recomments to his readers to engrave their seals with the dove or fish. That a soldier of the Roman army had Christian sympathies should not surprise, as many Roman soldiers appear in the New Testament as Christian converts or god-fearers. *Acts* 10:1, 22 presents the centurion Cornelius, a god-fearer from Caesarea. In *Acts* 27: 43 a centurion is willing to save Paul. A devout soldiers features in *Acts* 10: 7. *PMich* 8.483 and 484 show a centurion of he *legio XXII Deiotariana* called Julius Clement, in Alexandria at the time of Hadrian. In 484.1, a letter of the centurion to his brother Arianus, there is the *chi-rho* symbol, possibly the abbreviation of the word 'centurion', ἑκατοντάρχης. In l. 14 the writer mentions the 'good pilot' (ἀγαθὸς κυβερνήτης), an image often used to describe Christ.

2. *Hadrian and Serapis*.

Abundant evidence indicates that Hadrian played a major role in the works of restoration of the buildings destroyed in the Diaspora Revolt.[12] For this reason he was hailed as saviour and benefactor both in Egypt and in Cyrenaica. An inscription on Mons Claudianus shows that the emperor celebrated his defeat of the Diaspora Jews by erecting a temple to Zeus-Helios-Serapis 'on behalf of safety and eternal victory'.[13] It is also debated whether or not Hadrian restored the Alexandrian Serapeum, possibly damaged in the war.[14] In any case, Hadrian portrayed himself as the saviour and defender of Serapis. Coins of Hadrian show the emperor clasping hands with Serapis, sitting in the Serapeion, and even assimilated with Horos and Serapis himself, while empress Sabina is represented as Serapis' wife Isis.[15] A portrait of Serapis in the animal form of a bull was also found in Hadrian's villa at Tivoli, an important centre for Hadrian's symbolic system of images (cf. Elena Calandra in this volume). Furthermore, after Hadrian left Britain in 122, he received news from Egypt about troubles over the Apis Bull, which suggests that, still at that time, he was expected to protect the cult.[16]

According to Galimberti, a major turning point in the religious policy of Hadrian was 124/5,[17] when the emperor joined the Eleusinian mysteries and subsequently promoted mysteries elsewhere, inclunding early forms of Christianity. At this date he also seems to have passed an edict in which he prohibited persecutions of Christians.[18] The *Historia Augusta* reports that Hadrian built temples without images, which were used for the veneration of different spiritual deities, and were attended by Christians, too:

'Every seven days, when he [*sc.* Alexander Severus] was in the city, he went up to the Capitolium, and he visited the other temples frequently. He also wished to build a temple to

[12] APPLEBAUM 1951.

[13] *OGIS* 2.678 p. 421. The inscription is dated to 23rd April 118. A temple to Serapis and Isis as Tyche at Mons Claudianus is also documented in a *proskynema*; see SHELTON 1990.

[14] According to MCKENZIE 2007, 195 Hadrian did not rebuild the Serapeum of Alexandria.

[15] *BMC* III 339, 344, 487ff, 507f. BIRLEY 1997, 238-39 attributes them to Hadrian's visit of 130.

[16] As BIRLEY 1997, 245 put it, 'Hadrian may be assumed to have inspected the animal about which there had been so much trouble'.

[17] GALIMBERTI 2007, 151-3.

[18] See Galimberti in this volume.

Christ and give him a place among the gods – a measure, which, they say, was also considered by Hadrian. For Hadrian ordered a temple without an image to be built in every city, and because these temples, built by him with this intention, so they say, are dedicated to no particular deity, they are called today merely Hadrian's temples. Alexander, however, was was prevented from carrying out this purpose, because those who examined the sacred victims ascertained that if he did, all men would become Christians and the other temples would of necessity be abandoned.'[19]

In Egypt, indeed, Hadrian built new temples, where Serapis and Isis were worshipped along with Hellenic gods, such as Helios, Zeus Hypsistos, Dionysos, Saturn, Asklepios, Ceres-Demetra-Kore.[20] This was in order to promote the integration of the Alexandrian and Egyptian religion with the Graeco-Roman *pantheon*, and ultimately, to foster loyalty to the empire. All these gods were deities of the underworld and symbols of resurrection and salvation, and could be associated (at least in the eyes of the pagans) with Christ.[21]

Apparently, Hadrian himself noticed an overlap of Egyptian Christianity with the worship of Serapis. In a letter to his brother-in-law Servianus, transmitted in the *Historia Augusta*, the emperor laments that

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[19] *HA Alex.Sev.* 43.5.6 *Capitolium septimo quoque die, cum in urbe esset, ascendit, templum frequentavit, Christo templo facere voluit eumque inter deos recipere, quod et Hadrianus cogitasse fertur, qui templa in omnibus civitatibus sine simulacris iusserat fieri,quae hodieque idcirco, qui non habent numina, dicuntur Hadriani, quae ille ad hic parasse dicebatur; sed prohibitis est ab his, qui consulentes sacra repperant omnes Christianos futuros. Si id fecissent, et templa reliqua disserenda*. Transl. by D. MAGIE, Loeb Classical Library. See GALIMBERTI 2007, 149 n. 153 for literature on the historicity of this information. MÉLÈZE MODRZEJEWSKI 1997, 307-12 thinks that a similar turning point took place in Alexandria and that Hadrian supported Christians, as well as JAKAB 2001, 63-5.

[20] See, for instance *OGIS* 2.678, the dedication around AD 118 of a temple to Zeus-Helios-Serapis by Hadrian on Mons Claudianus, on behalf of his victory over the Jews.

[21] BELL 1954, 20-22 on the mysteric aspects of Serapis. Cf. for instance the oath formula, found in *PSI* 10.1162 'by the god who separates earth from heaven and light from darkness and day from night and the world from chaos and life from death and birth from decay'. Other mystic characteristics of the cult are mystic meals, and the so-called *katochê*, that is, segregated life in the temple of Serapis as a form of spiritual purification. The story of the Carthaginian martyrs Satyros, Perpetua and Felicitas, who were led up to their execution dressed as priests of Saturn, and priestesses of Ceres, is emblematic of this confusion. *Passio Perpetuae*, MUSURILLO 1972, no. 8. On the similar iconography of Serapis and Christ, see below, n. 30.

'The land of Egypt, the praises of which you have been recounting to me, my dear Servianus, I have found to be wholly light-minded, unstable, and blown about by every breath of rumour. There those who worship Serapis are, in fact, Christians, and those who call themselves bishops of Christ are, in fact, devotees of Serapis. There is no chief of the Jewish synagogue, no Samaritan, no Christian presbyter, who is not an astrologer, a soothsayer, or an anointer. Even the Patriarch himself, when he comes to Egypt, is forced by some to worship Serapis, by others to worship Christ'.[22]

It has long been orthodox to believe that this letter is spurious. However, both in his recent book on Hadrian, and in the present volume, Galimberti suggests that the kernel of the letter is authentic, and hypothesises that Hadrian wrote it after his trip to Egypt.[23] The letter shows clearly that Hadrian was surprised by the presence of Christians in the Serapeum, as if this was an anomalous situation, definitely different from the developments of Christianity in the rest of the Mediterranean. This 'Egyptian anomaly' is worth further investigation.

3. *A cosmopolitan temple*.

From the times of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 BC), the Serapeum hosted the famous library, which in turn housed, among other famous texts, the Greek Bible so-called 'of the Seventy', or *Septuaginta*. This translation was the most important sacred text for the Egyptian Jews and, later, became the version of the Bible used by the Christians.[24] Other copies of the Bible were presumably kept in the Great Synagogue of Alexandria, until its

[22] *HA QT* 8, 2. Loeb translation by MAGIE. *Aegyptum, quam mihi laudabas, Serviane carissime, totam didici levem, pendulam et ad omnia famae momenta volitantem. Illic qui Serapem colunt Christiani sunt, et devoti sunt Serapi qui se Christi episcopos dicunt. Nemo illic archisynagogus Iudaeorum, nemo Samarites, nemo Christiamorum presbyter non mathematicus, non haruspex, non aliptes. Ipse ille patriarcha cum Aegyptum venerit, ab aliis Serapidem adorare, ab aliis cogitur Christum.*

[23] For the earlier literature on the debate on he authenticity of this letter, see Galimberti's contribution to this volume.

[24] On the Septuagint as the highlight of the library, cf. the *Letter of Aristeas*, written by a Jew of Egypt possibly in the second century BC. On the importance of the Serapeum and Serapis for the Jews, cf. MUSSIES 1979. On the library in the Serapeum and the translation of the Bible, cf. COLLINS 2000.

destruction in the Diaspora Revolt under Trajan,[25] and as late as in AD 197, the Christian apologist Tertullian states that the Serapeum still contained the library and the Septuagint.[26] The importance of the Septuagint as a core text defining the identity of the Jewish and Christian communities in Egypt should not be underestimated. In my view, it is likely that the presence of the Septuagint made the Serapeum a holy place for both Jews and Christians.

Serapis and the Serapeum had a special relationship with the Greek translation of the Bible, since the times when Demetrius of the Phaleron, the director of the library and the promoter of the translation under Philadelphus, regained sight thanks to a miracle of Serapis and composed paeans to the god which were sung for long in his sanctuaries.[27] The temple, moreover, was in the Jewish quarter, the Delta, and evidence shows that the Serapeum attracted both Jews and Christians as late as in the fourth century, when the lamp workshop near the temple manufactured pagan, Christian and Jewish lamps.[28] Finally, Rufinus, writing in 402, provides details about the temple, which he saw two or three decades earlier. There were *hexedrae* and quarters for the Egyptian priests (*pastophoria*) but also houses (*domus*) in which temple keepers or those called 'the ones who make themselves pure (ἁγνεύοντες) had been accustomed to gather'.[29] Among these people there might have been Jews and Christians.

The iconography of Serapis as a Greek bearded god with sun-rays around his head like Helios, ram's horns like Ammon, a serpent encircling his sceptre like Asklepios, the horn of plenty in his left hand like Pluto, a club like Herakles, a sceptre in his left hand and the right hand raised as a sign of majesty like Zeus, presents strong points of contact with the iconography of Christ.[30] Serapis also appears as a sacrificial bull and, alternatively, a

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[25] On the destruction of the synagogue, see the Talmud of Jerusalem: *jSukkah* 5.55-58b. Cf. also *Suk*. 51a; *Tosef*., *ib*. iv.; *jSuk*. 55a. We do not know where the synagogue was, but we can hypothesise that it was in a Jewish quarter, the Delta being the most famous one. One may hypothesise that Hadrian might have built a pagan temple on the foundation of the Great Synagogue, as a sign of his success in quelling the Diaspora Revolt. Under Cyril (412-44) many synagogues were closed (Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* 7, 13 Hansen 357-9) and were then converted to churches including one which was named after St. George.

[26] *Apol*. 18.8. *Ita in Graecum stilum exaperta monumenta reliquit. Hodie apud Serapeum Ptolemaei bibliothecae cum ipsis Hebraicis litteris exhibentur*; for the date see *OCD*[3] 1487.

[27] Diog. Laert. 5.76.

[28] MCKENZIE 2007, 249; 410 n. 109, with reference to MLYNARCZYK 1995.

[29] Rufinus *HE* 11.23. Transl. by REYES in MCKENZIE *et al.* 2004, 106.

[30] I reworked the description of Serapis offered by TRAN TAM TINH 1982, 115. On the iconography of Christ as a case of religious competition with the image of earlier pagan gods, cf. MATHEWS 2005, 3-22.

shepherd, which recalls the image of Christ as a sacrificial lamb and as the 'good shepherd'.[31] Besides, the so-called 'Serapis aretalogies', a genre of religious poetry popular in Egypt, speak of the miracles performed by Isis and Serapis in tones and language similar to those used in Christian literature for Mary and Jesus. In particular, the beginning of the aretalogy of Isis, with the words ἐγώ εἰμι followed by the liturgical epithets, was taken over in the Christian liturgy.[32]

Some Christian documents have provoked debate among scholars because they contain allusions to the worship of Serapis. *PMich* 3.213, of the third century, presents the words τοῦ θεοῦ θέλοντος, commonly used by Christians, but begins with an invocation to Serapis. Epithets such as κύριος or θεός in Egyptian papyri were often used with reference to Serapis, who, as a god of healing and the underworld, is often addressed in prayers for the health of ill people.[33] The *proskynema*, the genuflection traditional in the worship of Serapis, was soon adopted and continued by Christians as their own act of devotion,[34] and a hitherto

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[31] On the Christian use of Greek sacrificial concepts and imagery, see now the stimulating book by PETROPOULOU 2008.

[32] TRAN TAM TINH 1982, 117 notes that 'no kinship is guaranteed' between the Isiac formulations and the analogous Christian ones. The epithets of Isis and Sarapis attested in documents have been listed by BRICAULT 1996. HARKER 2008, 67 n. 88 notes that some Serapis miracles are included in the sources of the Principate, e.g. Dio 77.15.1, a vision of Geta appeared to Caracalla in the temple of Serapis; Dio 79.7.3 states that a fire miraculously appeared in the Serapeum shortly before Caracalla's death, but did not damage the temple. Cf. Serapis miracles in literature related to the *Acts of the Alexandrian Martyrs*, *CPJ* 2.157; 2.154 set in the Serapeum; *SB* 6.9213. Cf. also the 'Isis aretalogies' in which all the goddesses of the world as mere names for the one true goddess Isis (e.g., *POxy* 11.1380). On Serapis and Isis as important elements in Christian self-definition see TRAN TAM TINH 1982.

[33] Such as in *POxy* 14.1678 of the third century, were Dius prays the god to save his sister. For Christian expressions such as ἐλεεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ and χάρις τῷ θεῷ in apparently 'pagan' papyri, cf. BELL 1944, 193 nn. 17 and 18. On the epithets of Christ cf. HURTADO 2003, on Christian *nomina sacra* featuring in the Antonine period cf. HURTADO 2006, 95 ff where he argues that *nomina sacra* originated from abbreviations in the Septuagint. Cf. *Suppl.Gr.* 1120 of AD 66-175, PMich inv. 1571 of 175-225, *PChester Beatty* II + PMich inv. 6238 of 80-150, *PBodmer* II + Inv. Nr 4274/ 4298 of 90-130, *PBodmer* 14 and 15 of 125-190, *POxy* 3523 of 150-175.

[34] In the early second century, Claudius Terentianus writes to Tiberianus, a veteran of the Roman army, that 'everyday I do in your name a *proskynema* to the lord Serapis and to the gods venerated in the same temples'. *PMich* 8.476; Strassi 2008, no. 11; cf. also *PMich* 8.477, 478. Sasnos, a Greek of the second or third century (*WChr* 116 p. 147) prescribes: 'Worship the divine, offer sacrifice to all the gods, make a pilgrimage to every shrine and leave behind a *proskynema*, hold especially in esteem the gods of the fathers and worship Isis and

neglected second-century letter from the Fayum, *BGU* 3.714, from a certain Tasoucharion to her brother Neilos, mentions a *proskynema* to Serapis, and prayers upon the safety of the recipients, along with greetings (ll. 15-16) from a certain ἄππα Σατορνεῖλος.[35] The title 'Apa' was a honorific title for Christian monks and priests of a high rank, and is likely to be Christian in our document, too.[36] The document, therefore, is important as it shows clearly that in the second century Christians of the Fayum respected Serapis and performed the *proskynema* to the god. The earliest Christian letter quoted by Naldini in his collection of Christian documents, *PMich* 8.482, is dated to 23rd August 133 and probably comes from Alexandria. Here, the anonymous writer tells his brother (ll. 15-17): 'If you wish to come and take me with you, come and wherever you take me, I will follow you and as I love you the god will love me'.[37] Another second-century document, *PMich* 8.493, shows a certain Sabinus writing to his mother and his wife in Karanis that he is awaiting to be tried by the new chief-judge in Alexandria, and (ll. 14-15) that 'with god's help I shall leave without delay'.[38] These documents are (convincingly) regarded as 'Christian', because of their tone and the echoes of the Gospels that they contain. However, one cannot exclude that the unnamed 'god' they refer to may well be the Alexandrian god *par excellence*, that is, Serapis, as is common in numerous second- and third-century documents of Alexandrian origin.

The Egyptian worship of Serapis certainly played a role in preparing a spiritual background for the diffusion of Christianity. The Egyptians, trained to celebrate the annual sacrifice and resurrection of Serapis for the redemption of the sins of the country, became genuinely interested in the story of the resurrection of Jesus, and Christian communities emerged, above all in the area of the Fayum. Both the literary texts and the documents show

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Serapis, the greatest of the Gods, the redeemers, the good, the well-pleasing, the benefactors'. On the Christian use of the *proskynema* cf. YOUTIE 1978, 265-8 [1981, 451-4]; *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* 3 (1983) 77 f; 4 (1987) 59-62. GERACI 1971, and the commentary to *POxy* 55.3809.3-7.

[35] *BL* 1.61, 11.20. Cf. the same characters in *BGU* 2.601 and 602, and *PGiss* 197. Cf. *BGU* 3.801 = CHAPA 1998 no. 3, another letter of Tasoucharion to Nilus.

[36] Cf. NALDINI 1998, 38. *PBon* 44 (*SB* 5.7616), another second-century letter, from Agathos Daimon to Kronion, probably from Tebtunis, mentions both the *proskynema* to Serapis and (l. 4) a θεῖος Eustathios as a beloved one for both the writer and the recipient. Cf. COPPOLA 1933, 666. BL 3.191.

[37] NALDINI 1998, nr. 1 [ὡ]ς φειλῶ σοι ὁ θεὸς ἐμὲ φειλήσι (ll. 25-6).

[38] 493.14-15 σὺν θεῷ ἐν τάχι ἀπαλλαγήσομαι.

that a turning point for the diffusion of Christianity was the Antonine period.[39] It must not be a coincidence that Octavius, in the omonymous dialogue by Minucius Felix, rebuked his friend Caecilius, who, on the way to the shore of Ostia, after seeing an image of Serapis, 'raised his hand to his mouth as is the custom of the superstitious common people, and pressed a kiss on it with his lips'.[40] The episode shows how the devotion to Serapis was especially irritating to Christian sensibility because of the competition between the two religious attitudes.

4. *The earliest churches in Alexandria.*

Mark is traditionally credited for evangelizing Alexandria during his visits there in the middle of the first century AD, when he converted Annianus, who became the first bishop around 62, but this tradition, recorded by Eusebius in the early fourth century, is commonly regarded as a later construction diffused by the Church of Rome.[41] Our knowledge of the growth of Christianity in Egypt in the second and third centuries, thus, comes mainly from the papyrological documentation. Christian manuscripts of the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John on papyrus codices, in the form of modern books, survive from the second century, and reflect the spread of the new faith outside Alexandria.[42] In the third century Antonius Dioskorus is described as a Christian in an official text dealing with minor public offices in Arsinoe (Medinet el-Fayum),[43] while Eusebius[44] indicates that there were Christians in Antinoopolis (el-Sheikh 'Ibada) at about this time, and that a conference was held at Arsinoe by Dionysius for the presbyters and teachers from surrounding villages. Then, in the period

[39] On the earliest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, see HURTADO 2006. On the epithets of Christ cf. HURTADO 2003. On Christian *nomina sacra* featuring in the Antonine period cf. HURTADO 2006, 95 ff, suggesting that *nomina sacra* originated from the abbreviations featuring in the Septuagint. Cf. *Suppl.Gr.* 1120 of AD 66-175, PMich inv. 1571 of 175-225, *PChester Beatty* II + PMich inv. 6238 of 80-150, *PBodmer* II + Inv. Nr 4274/ 4298 of 90-130, *PBodmer* 14 and 15 of 125-190, *POxy* 3523 of 150-175.

[40] Transl. ROBERTS – DONALDSON.

[41] Eus. *HE* 2, 16 and 24. For Jerome, *De viris illustr.* 8 (392), St Mark died in the eighth year of Nero, that is, 61. Legend of Mark as later construction imposed by Rome: Pearson 1986, 210.

[42] BELL 1944, 199ff; ROBERTS 1979, 12-14.

[43] VAN MINNEN 1994.

[44] *HE* 6, 11, 3 and 7, 24, 6.

330-350 the number of churches attested in the documents dramatically increase and the diffusion of monasteries reshape the geography of the countryside.[45]

Not much is known about the earliest Christian churches in Alexandria. The *ekklesia* of Theonas, the cathedral, built by the patriarch Peter I (AD 300-11) and named in honour of his predecessor, is described as a *basilica*[46] and is generally identified with the Mosque of One Thousand Columns in the western part of the city, an area close to Christian cemeteries.[47] According to McKenzie, this church was newly built and did not continue an earlier religious building. However, it is interesting to note that the rabbinical sources describe the Great Synagogue of Alexandria as a grand *basilica* (with a Latin word). Although this is a mere hypothesis, it would be indeed attractive to think that the Theonas church was built on its foundations.[48]

Another early church is the so-called church of Boukolou or Baukalis, near the *martyrium* and the underground tomb of St Mark.[49] The origins and location of the Boukolou church are enigmatic. According to the *Acts of St Mark*, this church was built, 'in the area beside the sea under crags called Boukolou'.[50] For Pearson, the martyrdom of St Mark took place in the north-western quarter of Alexandria, by the beaches, where the Jewish community was, by the Kibotos harbour, a part of the Eunostos harbour, in the Delta quarter.[51] Interestingly, Strabo states that, from the times before the foundation of Alexandria, *boukoloi*, 'herdsmen', lived in the area of Rhakotis near the Alexandrian Serapeum, in the

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[45] PEARSON 1986, 235-306 on early development of monasticism in Egypt. Bagnall and Wipszycka studied the spread of Christian names through the population and assert that, by 312 18% of the population was Christian. BAGNALL 1982; 1987 and 1993, 53-4; 264, 278; WIPSZYCKA 1986, 173-81; 1988, 164-5. On Byzantine Egypt see now Bagnall (ed) 2007.

[46] Athanasius, *Chronicon Praevium* 11, *PG* 26, col. 1356D.

[47] MCKENZIE 2007, 240 (however, this hypothesis is not guaranteed).

[48] The size and splendour of the synagogue were the subject of glowing descriptions in the schools of Palestine and Babylon: "He who has not seen it, has not seen the glory of Israel", said the rabbis (*jSuk* 51b). It was a vast Hellenistic-style edifice, where the officers of the Alexandrine congregation would wave a flag to signal congregants on distant benches when to respond. The building is described as a *basilica* with columns and seventy seats, holding 100.000 worshippers, and as a double stoa. See *Midr. Teh.* on *Ps*. xciii.

[49] *Acts of St Mark* 5, *PG* 115 col. 168A; MCKENZIE 2007, 240.

[50] *Acts of St Mark* 5, *PG* 115, col. 168 A. *Boukolou topoi*: CALDERINI *Dizionario* I, 105, 173; II, 62-64 on *Boukolon kome*; GASCOU 1998, 37-9, 43-4; MCKENZIE 2007, 240-2; the church was enlarged under Constantine, and was the see of the presbyter Arius. On the meaning of *Boukolou* cf. PEARSON 1986, 141, 153, n. 122, 242. GASCOU 1998, 391.

[51] PEARSON 2004, 109-110

Delta quarter.[52] But a search for *boukolos* shows that, while in Greece the term indicated an adept of Dionysos, in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt it could mean 'devotee of Serapis'.[53] As a matter of fact, Serapis was often represented as either the sacrificial Apis Bull, or as a shepherd.

This information suggests that the site of the church of Boukolou could have been the site of an earlier temple to Serapis, which should not surprise, as there is evidence of other early Christian churches in Alexandria built on Serapis shrines (cf. below). Further documents seem to indicate that there was some connection between the neighbourhood of the *boukoloi* and the cult of Serapis. *PHeid* 7.400, two second-century letters of Sempronius to Satornila, mention the *proskynema* to Serapis and a 'quarter of the *boukoloi*' (ll. 15-16), probably in Alexandria,[54] while a third-century letter of Ptolemais to Zosimos, *WChr* 21 (*BGU* 2.625) mentions a place called Boukolia in Alexandria along with a *proskynema* to Serapis.[55] We must now investigate the identity of the *boukoloi*.

5. *The revolt of the Boukoloi*.

A pressure group called 'Boukoloi' troubled Egypt around 172, in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, in a major revolt that was quelled by Avidius Cassius. In 175, however, Avidius Cassius went to Alexandria and was declared emperor by his troops in the East,[56] and in 176 Marcus Aurelius spent the winter in Alexandria quelling the sedition.[57] Dio's description, summarised by Xiphilinus, depicts the Boukoloi in violent tones, as transvestites and cannibals:

'The people called the Bucoli began a disturbance in Egypt and under the leadership of one Isidorus, a priest, caused the rest of the Egyptians to revolt. At first, arrayed in women's garments, they had deceived the Roman centurion, causing him to believe that they were

[52] Strabo 17.1.6 (792).

[53] *LSJ s.v.*; *UPZ* 57.

[54] Cf SIJPESTEIJN 1976, 169-81; L.C. YOUTIE 1982, 92-4; CHAPA 1998, no. 4.

[55] *SelPap* 1.120.

[56] Cf. a letter of Avidius Cassius preserved on papyrus, *SB* 10.10295; BOWMAN 1970.

[57] As suggests *CIL* 3.6578, a statue base of 176 found in Alexandria, with a dedication to Marcus Aurelius by a tribune of the *legio II Traiana*.

women of the Bucoli and were going to give him gold as ransom for their husbands, and had then struck down when he approached them. They also sacrificed his companion, and after swearing an oath over his entrails, they devoured them. Isidorus surpassed all his contemporaries in bravery. Next, having conquered the Romans in Egypt in a pitched battle, they came near capturing Alexandria, too, and would have succeeded, had not Cassius been sent against them from Syria. He contrived to destroy their mutual accord and to separate them from one another (for because of their desperation as well as of their numbers he had not ventured to attack them while they were united), and thus, when they fell to quarrelling, he subdued them'.[58]

It has been noticed that the portrait of the Boukoloi is similar to the characterisation (in Dio 69.13) of the Jews in the Bar Kochba Revolt of 132-5: a small revolt that spreads to the rest of the country, people committing atrocities against the Romans, a special general being sent from another field of operations, the extraordinary strength of the enemies due to their unity and desperation, the winning strategy of dividing to conquer. The atrocities committed by the Boukoloi, such as cannibalism and torture, recur in Dio's description (68.32) of the Jews in the Diaspora Revolt. However, these analogies must be read as propaganda, and by no means imply any Jewish presence in the revolt of the Boukoloi.[59] According to Winkler, the story of the Boukoloi, far from being an impartial account, must be read from the point of view of the Roman fear of Alexandria, and, indeed, the story shows

[58] Dio [Xiphilinus] 72.4 καὶ οἱ καλούμενοι Βουκόλοι κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον κινηθέντες καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Αἰγύπτιους προσαποστήσαντες ὑπὸ ἱερεῖ τινι [καὶ] ᾽Ισιδώρῳ, πρῶτον μὲν ἐν γυναικείοις στολαῖς τὸν ἑκατόνταρχον τῶν Πωμαίων ἡπατηκότες ὡς δὴ γυναῖκες τῶν Βουκόλων καὶ χρυσία δώσουσαι αὐτῷ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀνδρῶν προσιόντα σφίσι κατέκοψαν, καὶ τὸν συνόντα αὐτῷ καταθύσαντες ἐπί τε τῶν σπλάγχνων αὐτοῦ σονώμοσαν καὶ ἐκεῖνα κατέφαγον· ἦν δὲ Ισίδωρος ἀνδρίᾳ πάντων τῶν καθ᾽ ἑαυτὸν ἄριστος· ἔπειτα ἐκ παρατάξεως τοὺς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ῾ Ρωμαίους νικήσαντες μικροῦ καὶ τὴν᾽ Αλεξάνδρειαν εἷλον, εἰ μὴ Κάσσιος ἐκ Συρίας πεμφθεὶς ἐπ᾽ αὐτούς, καὶ στρατηγήσας ὥστε τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους σφῶν ὁμόνοιαν λῦσαι καὶ ἀπ᾽ ἀλλήλων ἀποχωρίσαι, διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀπόνοιαν καὶ τὸ πλῆθος αὐτῶν οὐκ ἐθάρρησε συμβαλεῖν ἀθρόοις αὐτοῖς, οὕτω δὴ στασιάσαντας ἐχειρώσατο. Transl. by E. CARY, Loeb Classical Library. See also *HA M. Ant.* 21.2; *HA Avid. Cass.* 6.7 on *Bucolici*.

[59] Cf. MILLAR 1985, 412.

literary elements taken from contemporary fiction such as Achilles Tatius and Lollianus, who characterised the Boukoloi as 'desperadoes'.[60]

Most probably, the revolt of the Boukoloi was not just a native revolt of dissatisfied Egyptian farmers and herdsmen of the area of the Delta against Roman rule.[61] Dio understood and reported that these people were a specific political group called 'Herdsmen', but the term did not indicate (only) real herdsmen. Most probably, the Boukoloi were a political and religious group of anti-Roman fighters and martyrs, possibly adepts of Serapis, as the Egyptian meaning of the term *boukolos* suggests, and this idea would help to explain why the leader of the revolt, Isidorus, was a priest.[62] The cult of Serapis had inspired earlier Alexandrian riots against Roman emperors, and many allusions to Serapis feature in the *Acts of the Alexandrian Martyrs* and related literature.[63] It is thus possible that the Boukoloi were Egyptian anti-imperial militants, possibly including lower-class men with a common religiosity, based on the idea of martyrdom. An interesting piece of evidence is a fragmentary second-century document from the Fayum, *SB* 14.11650, probably an oracle, predicting that 'when the moon will be in the constellation of Leo … there will be a ταραχή in Egypt ….and there will be death for the Boukol[oi]'. It is worth noting that oracles were usually associated with Serapis.[64]

The years of the revolt of the Boukoloi were a time of anti-imperial revolts elsewhere, especially the revolt of Avidius Cassius, a revolt in which the Christians may have

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[60] WINKLER 1980, 177; for RUTHERFORD 2000, 109 'The human sacrifice here is strongly reminiscent of the *Scheintod* in Achilles Tatius, and the possibility arises that Cassius Dio, or his source (possibly Marius Maximus), was influenced by contemporary fiction.'

[61] ALSTON 1999 sticks to the interpretation of the Boukoloi as herdsmen and rural classes.

[62] BALDINI 1978, 643 first hypothesised that the revolt of the Boukoloi had a religious character (he also thought – cf. p. 650 – that the rebellion might have attracted also a Jewish anti-Roman group). For WINKLER 1980, 181, '*something* happened around 171/2 A.D., and [Avidius] Cassius did something to restore the order which the Romans preferred. The rest is fiction and anecdotal history'. A document from Tebtunis (Fayum) of around AD 150, *PSI* 12.1234, mentions a τάξις or 'class' of ἱεροβούκολοι, probably a priestly category. In two documents from the Fayum, *PBerlLeihg* 1.10 and *PFamTebt* 20.1 (both of AD 120/1), a certain Boukolos is the priest of the cult of Alexander the Founder and the chief-judge at Alexandria. Another Boukolos, son of Ho(rus?), is a priest in *PStrasb* 5.381 (possibly of AD 55-67).

[63] Cf. miracles of Serapis in literature related to the *Acts of the Alexandrian Martyrs*, for ex. *CPJ* 2.157, 2.154 set in the Serapeum, and *SB* 6.9213; see HARKER 2008, 67 n. 88.

[64] The text also mentions a βασιλεύς (l. 6), possibly either a Roman emperor or a messianic king.

participated along with other rebels.[65] Hippolytus Romanus (*In Danielem* 4.18f) quotes the case of a group of Christians, led by a bishop, who withdrew to the desert waiting for an imminent return of Christ. The governor thought they were brigands and was about to send the army, although his (Christian?) wife convinced him not to do so. On the basis of episodes like these, Eusebius could have presented the millenarian movement started by Montanus and his prophetesses as an insurrectional group which urged Christians to become martyrs.

After the revolt of Cassius, some who had made predictions 'as if inspired by the gods' (in the plural) were banished. Obviously, their predictions were against the Roman emperor and in favour of Cassius. The *Historia Augusta* states that a man predicted fire from heaven and the end of the world when he fell from a tree and turned into a stork. He did fall, let a stork emerge from his vest, and was promptly arrested, although Marcus Aurelius mercifully pardoned him.[66] According to Dio, however, the emperor was so clement, that after the death of Avidius Cassius he asked the Senate for a universal amnesty and put no rebel to death.[67]

Montanism and other millenarian movements as those mentioned above expected the end of the world, and this led to behaviours that might be taken as politically subversive. Although a connection between such movements and the revolt of Avidius Cassius cannot be demonstrated, there are striking similarities between the movement of the Boukoloi in Egypt and the *Circumcelliones* and Donatists in fourth-century Northern Africa.[68] According to recent studies, anti-imperial movements based on the idea of martyrdom (of the Maccabaean type) were common in the lower classes in Northern Africa even before the fourth-century,[69]

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[65] A passage in Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 2.5 suggests that the supporters of the revolt of Cassius, including maybe some Christians, were accused of *maiestas*: *Sic et circa maiestatem imperatoris infamamur; tamen nunquam albiniani, nec nigriani, uel cassiani inueniri potuerunt christiani, sed idem ipsi qui per genios eorum in pridie usque iuraverant, qui pro salute eorum hostias et fecerant et uouerant, qui christianos saepe damnauerant, hostes eorum sunt reperti.*

[66] Ulpian in *Mos. et Rom. legum coll.* 15.2.5; *HA M. Ant.* 13.6.

[67] Dio 72.27-8.

[68] Epiph. *Haer*. 49.1; Tert. *Fug*. 9.4; Eus. *HE* 5.6.18-19. On Montanism, see HIRSCHMANN 2005 and TABBERNEE 2007. On the anti-imperial movement of the *Circumcelliones* in fourth-century North-Africa, that ultimately belongs to the Donatists, see CACITTI 2006, according to whom (p. 4), the term *circumcelliones* designated the deviation from the canonic rule, characterised by antisocial behaviour of individuals or groups, of a monastic or a clerical nature. They distinguished themselves for their extreme poverty, itinerant habits, the exercise of violence, directed to the establishment of justice, and by peculiar liturgical customs.

[69] CACITTI 2006, 14.

thus we may be in presence of a phenomenon of *longue durée* that involved both the Boukoloi and Christians in Egypt, and their African counterparts.

The second great issue of Christian apologetic literature took place in such a framework, when, after the revolt of Cassius, Marcus Aurelius and Commodus were travelling in the East. At least five apologists defended Christianity in works addressed to the emperor and his heir.[70] Apollinaris recalled episodes in which Christian soldiers remained loyal to M. Aurelius on the Danube in 175. Roughly at the same time, Melito, bishop of Sardis, complained about new Roman decrees that ordered the expropriation of Christian property and the persecution of Christians, and asserted the loyalty of Christians to the empire. In 177, Athenagoras said that no slave would accuse the Christians, even falsely, of murder or cannibalism (although, according to Eusebius, these charges had actually been made by slaves of Christians from the persecuted churches of Lyons and Vienne in the summer of the same year).[71] Finally, in 180 or 181, Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, alludes (*To Autolycus* 1.11) to the revolt of Cassius and insists on Christian loyalty to the emperor. Two decades later, Tertullian[72] still spoke of the loyalty of Christian soldiers to Marcus Aurelius, and reiterated that no Christians supported Cassius.

All these apologetic works may well have reflected juridical prosecutions passed in 176-180, that punished Christians (along with other rebels) for their supposed participation in the revolt of Avidius Cassius. The participation of some Egyptian Christians in the aforementioned revolt links them to the Boukoloi, as the revolt of the Boukoloi *de facto* helped Cassius to become emperor. In other words, the Boukoloi, willingly or not, were deemed responsible for the rise of Cassius against the emperor.[73] It is not impossible that, at least some Egyptian Christians, like the Boukoloi, celebrated anti-imperial revolution as a religious mission and martyrdom as a value. As a matter of fact, there is evidence that martyrdom and the cult of the corpses of martyrs was especially valued in Egypt, so that, still

[70] For an analysis of the works of these apologists, see GRANT 1988.

[71] Athenagoras, *Embassy concerning Christians*, 35; *HE* 5.1.14.

[72] *Apol*. 5.6; 35.9.

[73] Minucius Felix (30.5) and Tertullian (*Apol.* 9.9) struggled to defend Christians from the accusations of infanticide and cannibalism, all accusations previously moved against the Boukoloi; see WINKLER 1980, 81-2 and also Eus. *HE* 5.1.14. Naturally, however, these were the stereotypical accusations directed against the anti-imperial rebels, whoever they were.

in the fourth century, St. Anthony exhorted the Egyptian Christians to stop keeping the mummies of dead relatives, and of martyrs, in their homes.[74]

6. *The end of the Serapeum and the normalization of Egyptian Christianity*.

Soon after the revolt of the Boukoloi was suppressed, the Alexandrian Serapeum was burnt down. Clement of Alexandria[75] mentions 'the *akra* which they call now Rhakotis, where stands the honoured sanctuary (*hieron*) of Serapis' as reconstructed by 190, while Jerome states that the *templum* (that is, the actual sanctuary) was burnt in 181.[76] The destruction of the Serapeum may be a further indication that the Boukoloi were connected with the worship of Serapis.

While Athanasius was patriarch (328-73) many churches were erected in the city, and by 375 the city had almost twelve churches, according to Epiphanius. These included the Caesareum, a church built on the earlier temple to Augustus, the Kaisareion, and another one built on top of a temple to Hadrian, the Hadrianon. Other churches include the Kyrinos, Theonas, Baukalis, St Mark, Pieirios, notably Serapion, the Persaia, Dizya, and the church of Annianos.[77] The temple of Dionysos was converted into a church in honour of Theodosius' son Honorius and also called the church of Cosma and Damian. Other churches were erected by Theophilus, such as a church in honour of Theodosius, one to Raphael on Pharos, the church of Three Young Men, and one dedicated to Mary in the Eastern part of the city.[78] Many of these churches may have been temples of Serapis and pagan sanctuaries.

The Council of Nicaea in 325 established new dogmas and rules for the Christian religion, and under Theodosius Christianity became a state religion. Christians now could not afford to tolerate local aberrant variants of the cult, and even the Egyptians had to conform to

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[74] Athanasius, *Vit. Ant.* 90-1. On the cult of martyrs in Egypt between local traditions and Christianity, see FRANKFURTER 1994, 31-2; CLARYSSE 1995.

[75] *Protrepticus* 4.42 and 47.

[76] Jer. *Chron. in Eus. HE* 7. The Serapeum was rebuilt between 181 and 215/16, when it miraculously survived to a fire during the reign of Caracalla. It is possible that the Serapeum was the *Pantheon* built by Severus in 205 MCKENZIE 2007, 195-203 and n. 130 p. 402. Indeed, the name *Pantheon* would be appropriate for the Serapeion, as other gods were worshipped there together with Serapis.

[77] MCKENZIE 2007, 231, 246-7.

[78] MCKENZIE 2007, 232-3 thinks that most of these churches were new buildings and did not reuse previous structures.

the standards imposed by the church. The destruction in 391 of the Serapeum of Alexandria by Theodosius (385-412) and by the Alexandrian bishop Theophilus marked the beginning of a new era:

'The governor of Alexandria and the commander-in-chief of the troops of Egypt assisted Theophilus in demolishing the heathen temples . . . All the images were accordingly broken in pieces, except one statue of the god before mentioned, which Theophilus preserved and set up in a public place; 'Lest,' said he, 'at a future time the heathen should deny that they ever worshipped such gods''.[79]

Among the 'heathen' mentioned in this passage, we should perhaps count the descendants of the Boukoloi and the radical Alexandrians who had supported the anti-imperial revolt of Avidius Cassius. Egyptian Christianity was normalized, and its anomalous behaviours erased. The site of the Serapeum hosted a new church to St. John the Baptist.[80]

7. Conclusion

This paper has argued that in the Roman period and at the time of Hadrian, the Alexandrian Serapeum could have been attended by both Jews and Christians. The presence of the Septuagint in the library of the Serapeum probably made this temple holy for both Egyptian Jews and above all for Christians, and documents show that, in Egypt, Christians often worshipped Serapis: a second-century letter shows Tasoucharion, a woman of a Christian community of a certain Apa Satorneilos, doing the customary genuflection to Serapis. This, in turn, lends support to the view that the core of the letter of Hadrian to Servianus, concerning the Christian presence in the Alexandrian Serapeum, is reliable. After the end of the Diaspora Revolt and the obliteration of the Jewish communities in Egypt, Hadrian's policy of religious pluralism and his favourable attitude towards mystery cults may have created more space for the development of early Christianity.

This paper has also hypothesised that the Boukoloi, who were the protagonists of an anti-imperial revolt in the 170s and were partly responsible for the rise of Avidius Cassius,

[79] Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.

[80] SCHWARTZ 1966, 97; PEARSON 2004, 108. MCKENZIE 2007, 245-8.

were not herdsmen, but a political and religious group based on the worship of Serapis. Due to the overlaps and affinities between Christian revolutionary movements and the Boukoloi, some Christians were accused of fomenting Cassius' revolt, hence the efforts of some apologists in order to prove that Christians had always been loyal to Marcus Aurelius. The involvement of at least some Egyptian Christians in the movement of the Boukoloi and in the rise of Cassius may be real. It may be compared with other millenarian or 'heretic' movements in the Near East and in Northern Africa, who participated in anti-imperial revolts.

The cults of Isis and Serapis, with their 'purification, abstinence, and initiation rituals – elements not foreign in other mystery cults – had unintentionally paved the way for the successful integration of Christianity'.[81] These cults presented a universalist doctrine that abolished ethnic and social barriers, promised a happy life in the eternal afterlife, celebrated martyrdom, and imposed precepts of continence and abstinence, including a daily liturgy, and castration. Most of these elements were taken over and developed by Egyptian Christianity. In this respect, Eusebius reports the rumour that Origenes, who lived an ascetic life and longed for martyrdom, had castrated himself, in order to emulate the evangelical precept 'there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake'.[82] Indeed, castration was an element of the Serapis cult, and Egyptian Christianity tolerated and even took over some aspects of this cult, thus, Origenes' mystic exaltation seems in line with what 'extremist' Egyptian Christians probably regarded as their national tradition.

The emperor Hadrian indeed favoured religious pluralism in Egypt. He built pluralistic temples in which different yet similar gods were associated, and avoided persecutions against Christians, and this could be one reason for the appearance and spread of Christian texts in Antonine Egypt. An indication of this policy of religious pluralism may be the promotion of the cult of Antinous, an entirely new cult that was added to the already crowded Graeco-Roman pantheon. The targets for the cult of Antinous were the Greek élites, while the lower classes (excluding, naturally, the Jews) were left with Serapis, Christ, or the other gods. The amazing spread of the cult of Antinous suggests that the religious pluralism of Hadrian worked on a universal level, and as a unifying factor of the empire. However, Hadrian's policy of religious pluralism eventually turned against the empire, because it gave space to anti-imperial movements, which periodically rose against the emperors. Avidius Cassius took advantage of these heterogeneous pressure groups, and used them to rise as an alternative

[81] TAKACS 1995, 204.

[82] On Origenes' castration: *HE* 6.8.1. Ascetic life: *HE* 6.3.11-12. Desire for martyrdom: *HE* 6.2.3 and 6.3.3-5.

emperor, although his coup eventually failed. The triumph of Christianity under Diocletian and Constantine may be regarded as one huge, yet unpredictable result of the religious pluralism that Hadrian had first promoted.

The rise of Christianity as a tolerated religion, then the official one in the fourth century, imposed a normalisation of the Christian worship in Egypt. Naturally, worshippers of Isis and Serapis in Alexandria and elsewhere did not simply turn into Christians and forsake old convictions.[83] The cults co-existed up to the moment of active Christian intervention, which took the form of imperial edicts, and, in the case of Alexandria, involved the physical annihilation of temples honouring Isis and Serapis under Theodosius.[84] The destruction of the Serapeum in 391 put an end to all forms of religious pluralism. All the Pantheons which had been subsidised by Hadrian were systematically destroyed, or converted into churches.

In the fifth book of his *Histories*, Tacitus states that, when Titus entered the temple of Jerusalem in 70, all the gods (in the plural) escaped from there:

'The doors of the inner shrine were suddenly thrown open, and a voice of more than mortal tone was heard to cry that the Gods were departing. At the same instant there was a mighty stir as of departure'.[85]

In this passage, Tacitus may have wanted to represent the temple of Jerusalem as a kind of 'Pantheon', similar to the temples without icons that were inaugurated by Hadrian (according to the passage in the *Historia Augusta* mentioned above), and where a plurality of 'invisible', or 'spiritual' gods were worshipped. Tacitus may have spontaneously associated the Jewish temple of Jerusalem with the Pantheons without icons, which were used by Christians in his time. The 'Christian Virgil' Prudentius sounds even more sarcastic than Tacitus, when he mocks the pathetic crowd of pagan gods and phantoms (*laruas*) that lurked behind the doors of Roman *Capitolia*.[86]

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[83] TAKACS 1995, 4-5.

[84] Theodoret *HE* 22 (Migne *PG* 80).

[85] Tacitus *Hist*. 5.13 *Apertae repente delubri fores et audita maior humana vox excedere deos; simul ingens motus excedentium.* Transl. A. CHURCH -W. BRODRIBB. Prof. E. Gruen pointed out the sarcasm of this passage in the Classics seminar in Durham in 2007.

[86] *C. Symm.* 1.622-31 *ipse magistratum tibi consulis, ipse tribunal* | *contulit auratumque togae donauit amictum,* | *cuius religio tibi displicet, o pereuntum* | *adsertor diuum, solus qui restituendos* | *Vulcani Martisque dolos Ueneris peroras* | *Saturnique senis lapides Phoebique furores,* | *Iliacae matris Megalesia, Bacchica Nysi,* | *Isidis*

amissum semper plangentis Osirim, | *mimica ridendaque suis sollemnia caluis* | *et quascumque solent Capitolia claudere laruas.*